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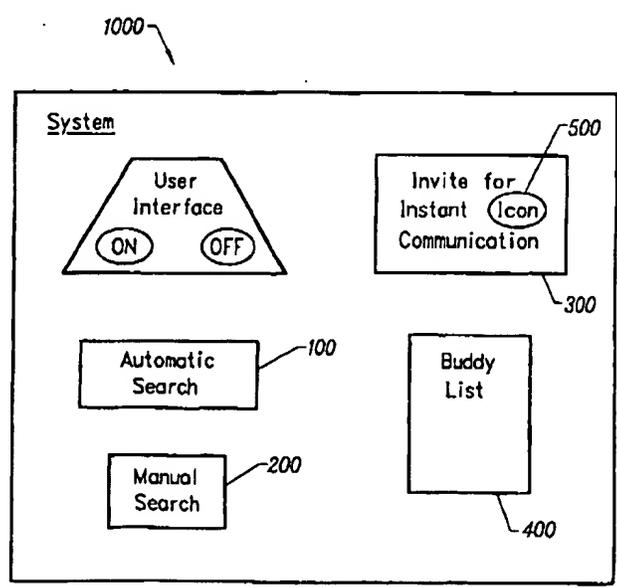
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(57) Abstract: A system for instant communication in real time is described wherein it is determined if a user with a given e-mail address is available for on-line messaging. The system takes in a group of e-mail addresses and automatically looks for screen names that are available for instant messaging. Once a screen name is available for online communication, an icon appears next to the screen name. Instant messaging is achieved by pressing the icon. The screen names, the icons and the e-mail addresses all appear in the same window, thereby, integrating traditional e-mail addresses with instant messaging services making real time communication an effective tool.

INTEGRATION OF E-MAIL WITH INSTANT MESSAGING SERVICES

5

TECHNICAL FIELD

The invention relates generally to software solving communication problems. More particularly, the invention relates to an integration of traditional e-mail
10 with instant messaging systems in real time.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART

With the advent of computers, communication has never been easier. When
15 friends and family are online, communication is much easier if invoked in real-time as it happens in instant messaging. Instant messaging using a computer invokes a real-time communication protocol.

In instant messaging using a real time communication protocol, real-time
20 communication is possible if the screen name of users is known before one begins instant messaging. The list of screen names of users is not completely useful for communication in real-time if the user with that particular screen name is not online. This means that for real-time communication to be

possible, not only should the screen name of users be known but also the users should be logged on before one begins instant messaging.

The end user usually has an address, referred to as 'e-mail address', which is
5 specific to the user for communicating electronically on a computer or similar
other devices. In electronic mail, messages can be sent, received, or stored at
convenient times. In conventional e-mail systems, messages are delivered in
"envelopes" which are then "opened" by the recipient to be read.

10 Conventional e-mail systems, operating across local area network
boundaries, do not allow the senders of messages to determine whether their
messages have been read. As a result, the sender of a message often must
telephone the recipient to verify that the needed information has not only
arrived at the recipient's system, but has been reviewed by the recipient.

15 Many proprietary e-mail systems, however, allow a sender to check a
separate database to see if a message has been received. Some proprietary
e-mail systems include an acknowledgement feature that allows the
recipient's e-mail system to send a notification to the sender when the
20 recipient has opened a message.

In prior art e-mail systems, the sender of an e-mail message has to wait a
while for a response. In addition, the sender of the message is not sure if they
would get an e-mail response. When users are logged into an e-mail, instant
25 messaging in terms of AOL Instant Messenger is possible. America Online,

Inc. of AOL Time Warner Inc. (AOL) pioneered the technology of instant messaging using a real time communication protocol.

In AOL Instant Messenger service, for example, the user could use any
5 number of screen names while being logged into an e-mail address and
communicate with other users instantly. However, for instant communication
to be possible, one has to look up manually the screen name that is actually
online currently for the associated e-mail address of the other users. The
problem with that is because there could be more than one screen name
10 associated with a single e-mail address, it becomes a difficult task to
accomplish instant online messaging service manually with many active
screen names.

In prior art systems, such as AOL's Mail Contacts Online, one has to be a
15 member to make use of Instant Messaging service. Usually, such
memberships entail a fee paid by the customer for using such services. In
Mail Contacts Online service, the graphics window shows (FIG. 1) a divided
window with e-mail communication window separate from the instant
messaging window. The instant messaging window shows a buddy list with a
20 list of screen names taken from the adjacent e-mail window and only those
screen names that are available for instant messaging.

The difficulty with prior art systems is that they are not universally available
unless the user requests membership to use the e-mail and/or Instant
25 Messaging and pays a membership fee. With the availability of e-mail access

to non-AOL members, the Instant Messaging service of prior art systems is limited in terms of number of screen names that are available in the buddy list. "Instant Messaging" is an AOL TM, so it is used herein to refer to "AOL Instant Messenger" for AOL members.

5

Given the number of Instant Messaging type services currently available, there is a need for integrating Instant Messaging services to e-mail services such that a user with access to any e-mail service, not limited to AOL member services, can use AOL's free Instant Messaging service and, thereby, achieve
10 communication in real-time.

What is needed, therefore, is a generic service where anyone with access to an e-mail and instant messaging service can chat with anyone else instantly. The generic services should allow a graphic window with e-mail and instant
15 messaging services to go simultaneously and smoothly so that the instant messaging is realized instantly in real time.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

20 This invention provides a mechanism for the automatic integration of traditional e-mail with instant messaging services such that instant communication is provided in real-time. In one embodiment of the invention, the system has a single generic graphics window with both e-mail addresses and on-line chat addresses next to it so that anyone with access to the e-mail
25 address could start the AOL's free instant messaging service instantly. The

active screen names that are available for instant messaging would have an icon next to the screen name, such that instant messaging is achieved by pressing the icon as it appears next to the screen name.

5 In the particular embodiment of the invention, the system takes in a group of e-mail addresses and makes a request for a list of screen names from the instant messaging service associated with that e-mail address. The system then automatically verifies each screen name that is available for online communication. Once a particular screen name is available for instant
10 communication, the system correlates that screen name to that particular e-mail address. An icon appears next to the screen name that is available for online instant messaging. Instant messaging is accomplished by pressing the icon as it appears next to the active screen name.

15 In one embodiment, the system sets up a list of screen names for tracking their online presence into a buddy list. In yet another embodiment, the system is associated with a user interface (UI) that prevents others from knowing the person's screen name. In yet another embodiment, the system allows a manual search when the screen name is not currently used but still
20 associated with the same e-mail addresses.

Next, the system enquires of the user associated with that particular screen name for online communication. The recipient can choose to communicate with the user by clicking the icon associated with the screen name that is

currently available for instant communication. Thus, the system establishes instant messaging in real time.

5

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a graphic representation of a prior art approach to indicating separate windows for e-mail addresses and instant messaging respectively;

10

FIG. 1A is a representative block diagram of the elements of a preferred embodiment of the invention for integrating traditional e-mail with instant messaging services for the purpose of providing communication in real-time;

15 FIG. 2 is a flow chart showing a mechanism for enabling an automatic real-time communication via e-mail according to this invention;

FIG. 3 is a flow chart of another embodiment of the invention showing a mechanism for enabling availability of a manual option for real time communication;

20

FIG. 4 is a flow chart showing a mechanism for inviting the user for instant communication to establish real-time communication according to the invention; and

25

FIG. 5 is a flow chart showing a mechanism for enabling a list of screen names, ex. a buddy list for instant messaging any time according to an alternative embodiment of the invention.

5

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In commercially available electronic mail systems today, senders are able to send messages over a variety of networks such as local area networks, wide
10 area networks, Internet, wireless networks, and the like. This does not, however, mean senders of the message would get an e-mail response instantly.

When users are logged into an electronic mail or e-mail, instant messaging is
15 possible if the recipient's screen name and e-mail address are known. Because users could use any number of screen names while being logged into an e-mail, this communication is, however, not instant communication in real-time. More often than not, it takes manually for a user to retrieve the screen name that is associated with that e-mail address and that is currently
20 being used for on-line communication.

This invention (FIG. 1A) provides a system for automatic integration 1000 of traditional e-mail with instant messaging service, more particularly, AOL's free Instant Messaging service for the purpose of providing communication in real-
25 time. The invention comprises a system that takes in a group of e-mail

addresses and makes a request for a list of screen names associated with that e-mail address from the instant messaging service. The system is associated with a user interface (UI) that protects the user's screen name if the user is not interested in on-line communication (represented in FIG. 1A as

5 OFF) and prefers to not make his screen name available to recipients of his messages. When the user screen name is not available to the system, the system makes a manual search 200 for the screen names that are associated with that e-mail address. The problem with a manual search 200 using only

10 knowledge of available e-mail addresses is that when a user manually does a search for screen names, there is no contextual information to indicate if the person is actually online or which screen name is being used. Because this becomes tedious, an invitation 300 is sent to the user for participation in on-line communication and a request for screen name applicable and used with that e-mail address.

15 Often the user is interested in on-line communication and would not mind if the screen names were available for on-line messaging. This is shown symbolically as an 'ON' state on user interface (UI) in FIG. 1A and the invention allows for automatic search 100. The system then automatically 100 verifies each screen name that is available for online communication. Once a

20 particular screen name is available, the system then correlates that screen name to that particular e-mail address. In one embodiment, the system periodically tracks a list of screen names for tracking their online presence and puts them into a buddy list 400.

An online real-time communication is established once the icon 500 is activated next to the screen name for instant messaging. The recipient can choose to communicate to the user by clicking on the icon associated with the screen name where the user is currently available for instant communication.

5 Thus, the invention establishes instant messaging in real time.

FIG. 2 is a flow chart showing a mechanism for enabling instant communication using an automatic 100 (FIG.1A) real-time communication via e-mail. When the user interface is enabled 10 (or is ON as in FIG.1A), the method involves taking in a group of e-mail addresses 20 and making a request for a list of screen names from an instant messaging service associated with that e-mail addresses 30. An automatic verification of screen names available for real-time communication 50 is performed for each individual screen name. If there is a screen name available for instant messaging, the system correlates the screen names available for that 15 particular e-mail address 60 and establishes real-time communication 70 by pressing an icon 500 (FIG. 1A) with that particular screen name. If there is no screen name available for instant messaging, the system cannot correlate the screen name with that particular e-mail address and simply continues the search for the next available screen name 40 for real-time messaging. When 20 real-time communication is established using the described automatic search 50, the system is said to have accomplished it's task and comes to a stop 80.

FIG. 3 is a flow chart showing a mechanism for enabling real-time 25 communication using a manual 200 (FIG.1A) search for the screen name.

- When the user interface is not enabled 110 (or is OFF as in FIG.1A), the method involves taking in a group of e-mail addresses 120 and making a list of screen names by manually looking for screen names 130 associated with that e-mail address and establishing instant messaging 140 if screen name is available. When real-time communication is established using the described manual search 130, the system then associates an icon (refer to 500 in FIG. 1A) 150 with the screen name that is available for instant messaging. The system is said to have accomplished its task and comes to a stop 150.
- 10 FIG. 4 is a flow chart showing another embodiment of the invention, which comprises, inviting the user for instant communication and requesting the user for screen name for real-time communication when the user interface (UI) is not enabled 210 (OFF in FIG.1A). This embodiment is useful in prompting the user for real-time communication when the user does not wish to disclose his
- 15 screen name to all individuals on the internet. The system takes in select group of e-mail addresses 220, manually tests for screen names available for instant messaging 230. If screen name is available 240 for instant messaging, the icon 500 (FIG. 1A) is pressed and instant messaging is established.
- 20 If the screen name is not available for instant messaging, then the system invites the user for instant communication 250 by sending an electronic mail or e-mail. If the invitation is accepted 270, then the system obtains the user's screen name 280, and establishes a real-time communication 290 when the icon 500 (FIG. 1A) is pressed. The system function is completed as real-time

communication is established and comes to a stop 300 or if the invitation is not accepted 260.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart showing another embodiment of the invention, which
5 comprises enabling a list of screen names into a list, referred to as buddy list for instant messaging any time. In this embodiment, the system sets up a list of screen names for tracking their online presence into a buddy list. The system does an automatic look up of screen names 330 when the user interface is enabled (ON in FIG.1A) given a list of e-mail addresses 320. It
10 then verifies if the available screen name is associated with that particular e-mail address and available for real-time communication.

If it is not available 350, it looks back at it's list of screen names and goes to the next one until one is found that is available for instant messaging. If the
15 system does find the screen name for that e-mail address available for instant messaging, it makes a buddy list of e-mail address with their associated screen names 360. The buddy list is periodically tested for online presence 370 and updated for establishing real-time communication 390 or returned 380 for the next available screen name for that e-mail address. When real-
20 time communication is established, the icon 500 is pressed for communication with the individual whose screen name is displayed and the process ends 395 with satisfactory completion.

Although the invention is described herein with reference to the preferred
25 embodiment, one skilled in the art will readily appreciate that other

applications may be substituted for those set forth herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Accordingly, the invention should only be limited by the Claims included below.

5

10

15

CLAIMS

1. A computer implementation method for instant communication,
5 comprising the steps of:
receiving in a group of e-mail addresses;
making a request for a list of screen names from an instant
messaging service associated with said e-mail addresses;
automatically verifying screen names that are available for real-time
10 communication;
correlating said screen names to said e-mail addresses; and
establishing said real-time communication by selecting an icon
associated with said screen name.
- 15 2. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of manually
verifying screen names associated with said e-mail addresses.
3. The method of Claim 2, further comprising the steps of manually
verifying screen names associated with said e-mail addresses that
20 are available for real-time communication.
4. The method of Claim 3, further comprising the step of making a list
of said screen names associated with a particular e-mail address.

5. A computer implemented method for updating a recipient of available screen names for instant communication, comprising the steps of:
- receiving in a group of e-mail addresses;
 - 5 making a request for a list of screen names from an instant messaging service associated with said e-mail addresses;
 - automatically verifying screen names that are available for real-time communication;
 - correlating said screen names to said e-mail addresses;
 - 10 making a list of e-mail addresses with their associated screen names;
 - updating said list periodically for establishing said real-time communication; and
 - establishing said communication instantly by pressing an icon
 - 15 associated with a user's screen name.
6. The method of Claim 5, further comprising the step of manually verifying screen names associated with said e-mail addresses for communication at a later time.
- 20
7. A method to start instant communication, comprising the steps of:
- receiving in a group of e-mail addresses;
 - manually verifying screen names associated with said e-mail
 - addresses that are available for real-time communication;
 - 25 sending an invitation for instant communication;

obtaining screen names that are available for real-time communication;

correlating said screen names to said e-mail addresses; and

establishing said real-time communication by selecting an icon with said screen name.

5

8. The method of Claim 7, further comprising the step of sending an invitation for instant communication via electronic mail.

10 9. An apparatus for enabling instant communication between users of a computer, comprising:

a means for displaying a graphic window;

a means for displaying e-mail addresses between said users of said computer for the purpose of online communication;

15 a means for displaying screen names associated with said e-mail addresses for the purpose of said instant communication; and

said graphic window including said e-mail addresses and said screen names in the same window for the purpose of enabling said

instant communication between said users of said computer instantly.

20

10. An apparatus for enabling instant communication as in Claim 9, further comprising a graphic icon situated next to said screen name of said graphic window for the purpose of indicating an availability of said screen name for instant messaging.

25

11. An apparatus for enabling instant communication as in Claim 10,
wherein said instant communication between users of said
computer is enabled by activating said icon.

5

10

15

20

25

Subj: My mail
Date: Jan. 10, 2001
From: Me
To: X,Y,Z
cc: A,B,C

Hi,
I have seen

Buddy List

Me
X
Y
A
C

FIG. 1

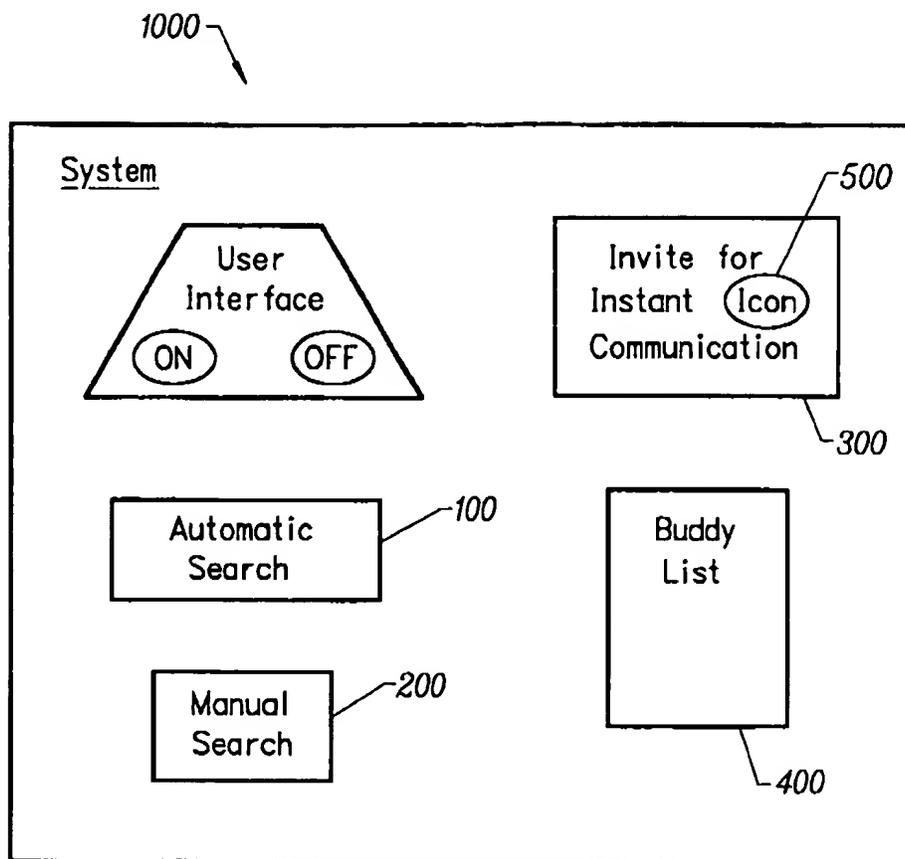


FIG. 1A

3/6

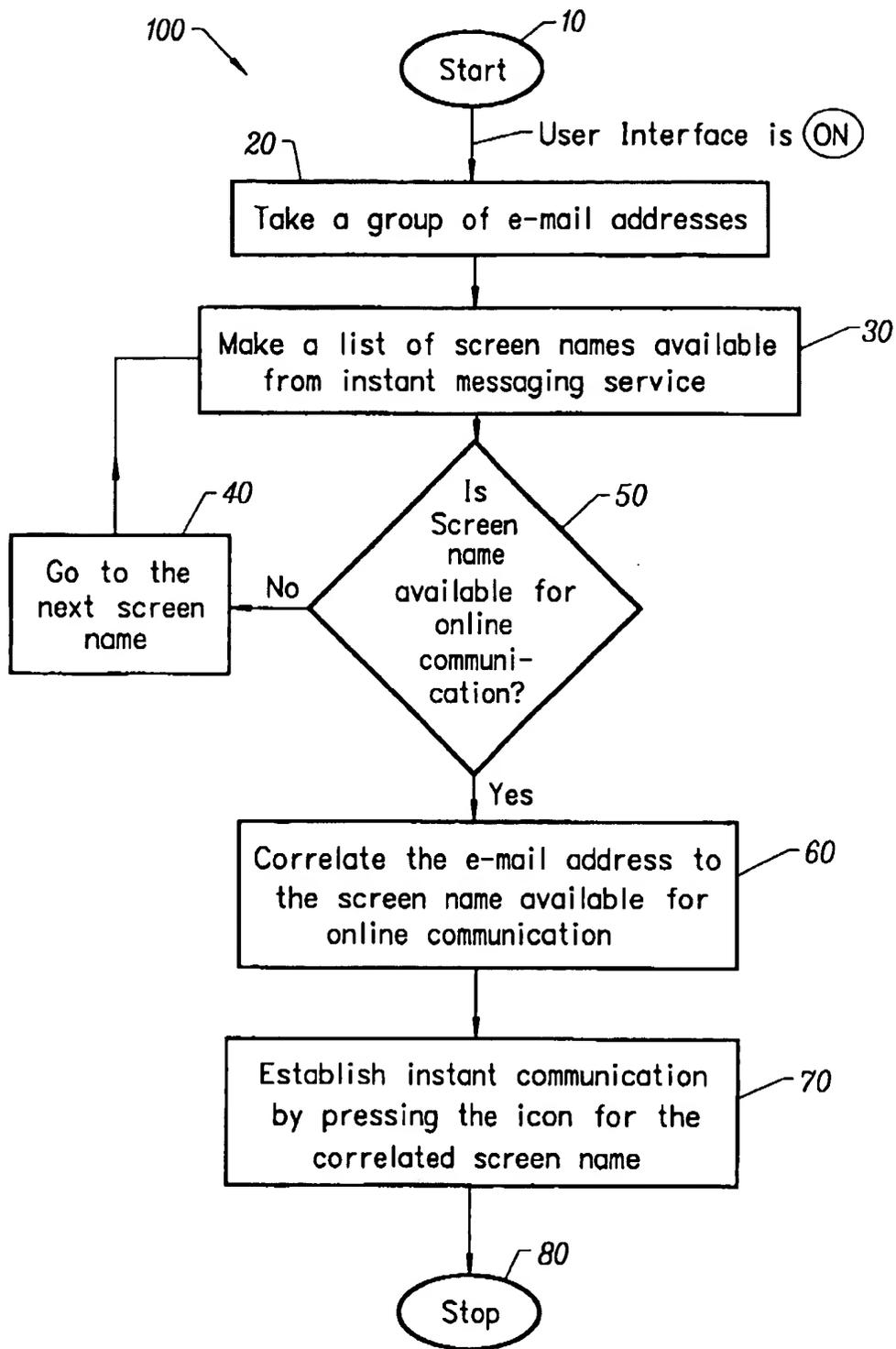


FIG. 2

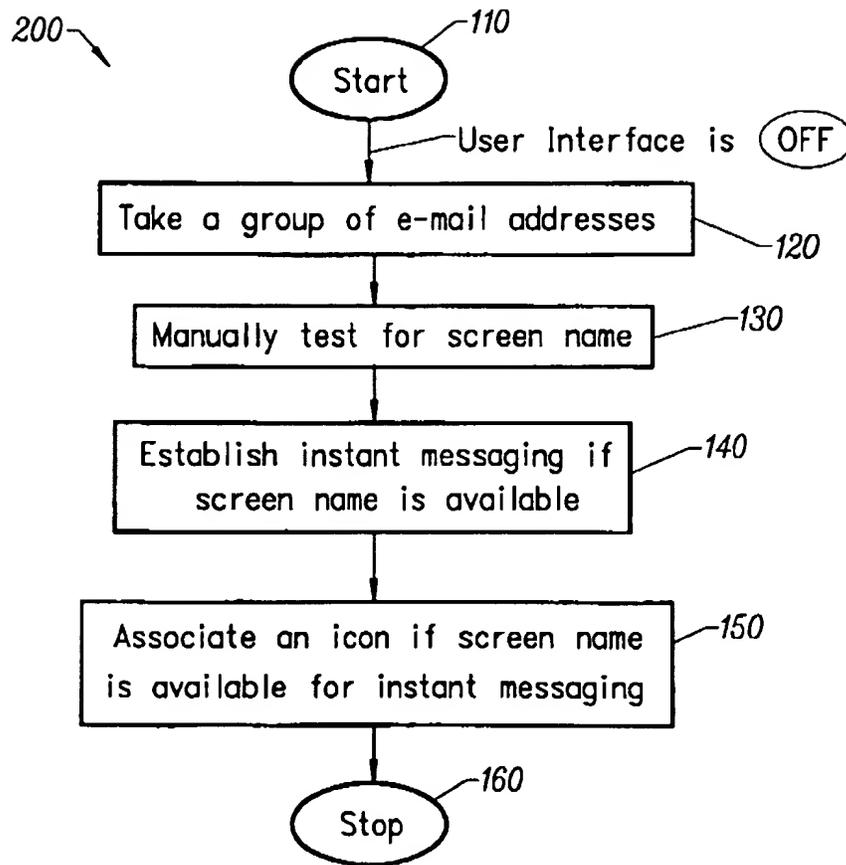


FIG. 3

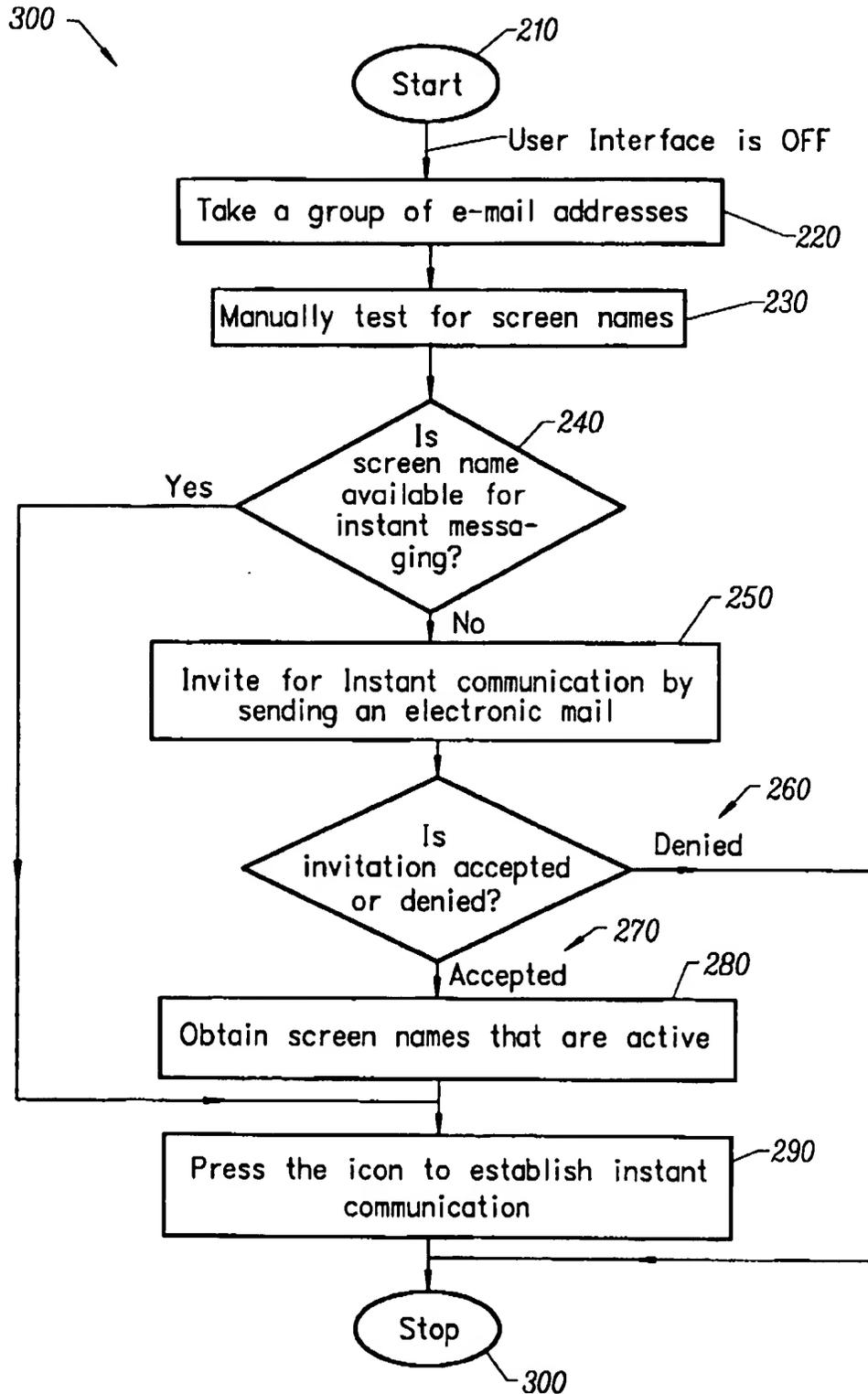


FIG. 4

6/6

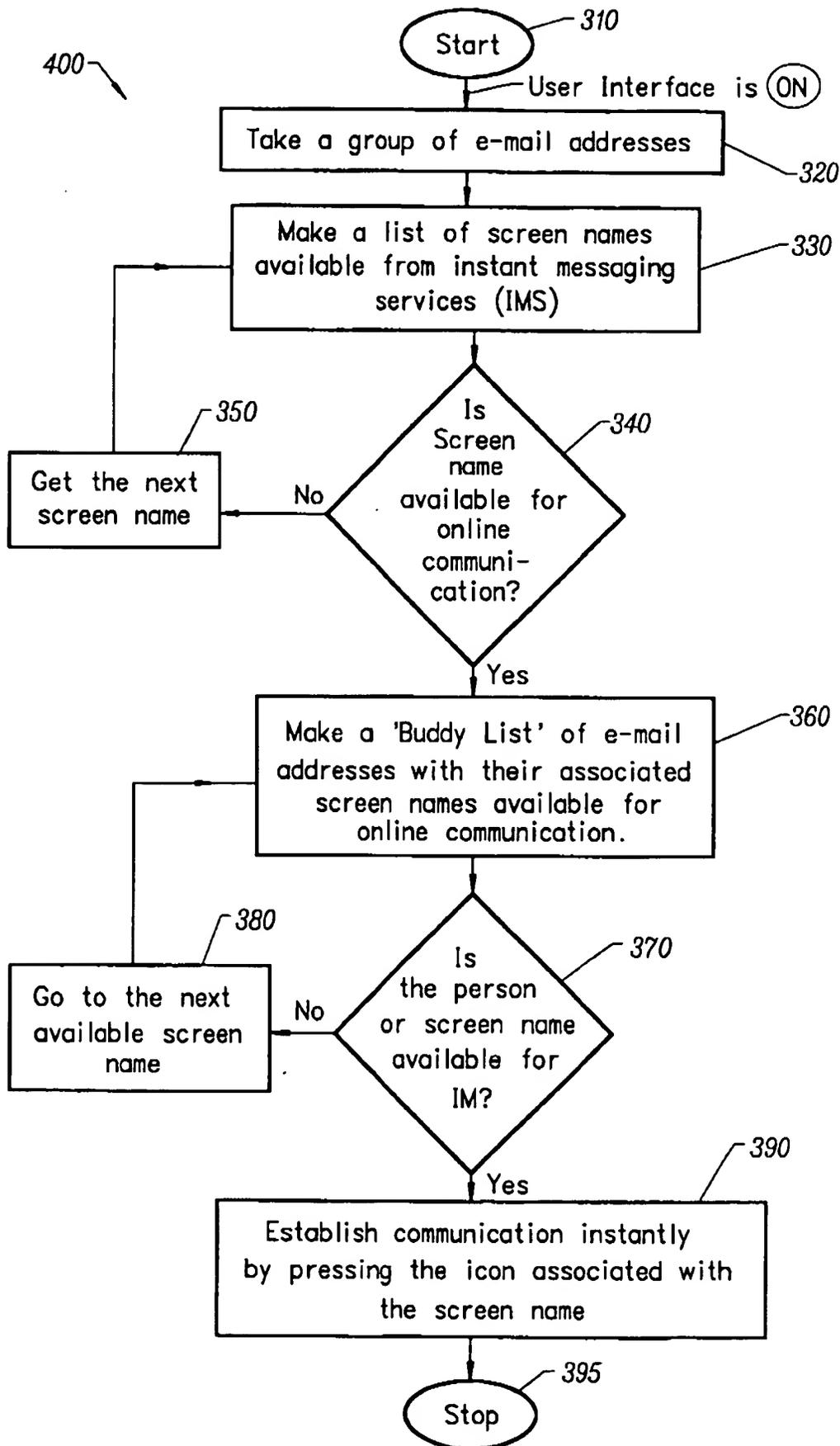


FIG. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/US 01/07319

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 IPC 7 H04L12/18 H04L12/58

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 H04L G06F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data, PAJ, INSPEC, IBM-TDB, COMPENDEX

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	<p>ESCHENBURG A: "Wo laufen sie denn? ICQ hält Verbindung zu Bekannten" CT MAGAZIN FUER COMPUTER TECHNIK, VERLAG HEINZ HEISE GMBH., HANNOVER, DE, no. 22, 26 October 1998 (1998-10-26), pages 92-95, XP000779803 ISSN: 0724-8679 page 92, left-hand column, line 1 -page 93, left-hand column, line 10</p> <p style="text-align: center;">--- -/--</p>	1-12



Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.



Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

- *A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
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- *Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.
- *&* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

5 November 2001

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Name and mailing address of the ISA

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Authorized officer

Ströbeck, A.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/US 01/07319

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	<p>KOHDA Y ET AL: "IMPP: A New Instant Messaging Standard and Its Impact on Internet Business" FUJITSU-SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL JOURNAL, FUJITSU LIMITED. KAWASAKI, JP, vol. 36, no. 2, December 2000 (2000-12), pages 147-153, XP000996852 ISSN: 0016-2523 page 150, right-hand column, line 1 -page 152, left-hand column, last line -----</p>	1-12